

NOTE ON THE BRAZILIAN FIRE-ANT, *SO-*
LENOPSIS SÆVISSIMA F. SMITH

By WILLIAM MORTON WHEELER

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NOTE ON THE BRAZILIAN FIRE-ANT, *SOLENOPSIS*
SAVISSIMA F. SMITH.

BY WILLIAM MORTON WHEELER.

While discussing the various North American forms of *Solenopsis geminata* Fabr. in a recent paper¹ I stated that the ant described many years ago as *Myrmica savissima* by Frederick Smith from specimens taken by Bates at Pará, is, in all probability, identical with the one later called *Solenopsis pylades* by Forel. My reasons for making this statement were these: "In the first place, Smith's description is unusually good and applies perfectly to the typical yellow *pylades*. In the second place, his specimens were received from Bates, who gives an interesting account of the habits of this 'fire-ant' in Brazil. Moreover, Mr. W. M. Mann, who collected extensively in the region where Bates collected his specimens and made his observations, tells me that it is there the only common and widely distributed *Solenopsis*, and the numerous specimens collected by Mr. Mann prove to be the typical *pylades* Forel." Forel, however, will not assent to this opinion.² He says that Smith mentions a worker major and a worker minor in his description, whereas it was precisely the feeble polymorphism of the worker that led to the separation of *pylades* from *geminata*. Surely Forel, who has had to spend so many precious hours in the interpretation of Smith's inadequate and faulty specific descriptions, ought not to regard his statements concerning major and minor workers as meaning anything more than a perceptible difference in size. My critic, however, completely ignores the second and third points of my contention, which to me seemed to be the more important.

In order to settle the matter, I sent several specimens of the typical yellow *pylades* Forel, taken by Dr. Mann at Pará, to my friend, Mr. Horace Dornithorpe, with the request that he compare them with the types of Smith's *savissima* in the British Museum. He writes me under date of July 3 as follows: "I compared

¹Some Additions to the North American Ant-Fauna. Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., 34, 1915, p. 395.

²Fourmis du Congo et d'autres provenances récoltées par MM. Hermann Kohl, Luja, Mayne, etc. Rev. Suisse Zool., 24, 1916, p. 459.

the ants you sent me with F. Smith's types (two workers on one card, one large, one medium) of *Solenopsis savissima* at the British Museum on Saturday and they agree perfectly in every way. The types were taken by H. W. Bates at Pará." There can be no doubt, therefore, that Forel's *pylades* is merely a synonym of *savissima* Smith.

Forel disagrees with me further on the rank of this form, maintaining that it should be regarded as a distinct species and not as a subspecies of *geminata*, because the polymorphism of the worker is very feeble, owing to the complete absence in the colonies of any large-headed forms like those of *geminata*. This is a matter of personal opinion. I called attention to the fact that two of our North American forms, *maniosa* Wheeler and *xyloni* MacCook are in this respect intermediate between *savissima* and *geminata*, and I may add that the Brazilian form *medusa*, recently described by Mann, is even more polymorphic than *geminata* since its largest workers have the head greatly enlarged and flaring in front, with very strongly curved mandibles. If *savissima* is elevated to specific rank, these forms should also have the same status, but in my opinion they may all be regarded as so many subspecies of a single variable species. I admit that it might be more logical to include *aurea* Wheeler as still another subspecies, with *amblychila* Wheeler as its variety. Owing to the great accumulation of forms in this section of the genus *Solenopsis* within recent years I am not altogether averse to regarding *savissima*, *geminata*, *maniosa*, *xyloni*, *electra*, *medusa* and *aurea* as so many different, though very closely allied, species.